Missouri Department of Mental Health
Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse

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Myths About Methamphetamine

Myth: Using methamphetamine once results in addiction.

Fact: Addiction develops with repeated use. While individual experiences will differ, research suggests that it may take 2 to 5 years for methamphetamine use to develop into addiction. Although, it may be a much shorter time period for more rapid routes of administration such as smoking and injection and for increased stimulant purity.[1] The majority of Missourians admitted to substance abuse treatment with a methamphetamine problem are either smoking and/or injecting their drug.

Myth: The average length of time from first use of methamphetamine to death is five years.

Fact: There is no data that suggests this is true. Missouri's methamphetamine users who are entering treatment for the first time have been using methamphetamine for 9.8 years on average. This is consistent with other research that shows the length of time between first use and first treatment admission is 7 to 10 years.[2]

Myth: Methamphetamine causes holes in the brain.

Fact: Brain scans (magnetic resonance imaging) display neural activity levels in various regions of the brain. Darkened areas indicate low or no functional activity and not physical holes. It is true that methamphetamine is a neurotoxin and can cause damage to nerve cells. The brain is often able to regenerate damaged structures during periods of sustained abstinence. With chronic use, some damage may be permanent.[3]

Myth: Methamphetamine addiction is not treatable.

Fact: While it is a commonly held belief that methamphetamine users are untreatable, research does not support this assertion. Clinical studies have shown that treatment outcomes for methamphetamine abuse are similar to that for other drugs such as cocaine. Research studies have compared methamphetamine users and cocaine users in treatment. The two groups do not differ in treatment adherence, as measured by clinic attendance, drug-free urines, and successful completion of treatment.[4] Better treatment outcomes are realized with longer periods in treatment. Research has shown that methamphetamine users with at least four months of treatment have almost double the rate of abstinence at two year follow-up.[5]

Myth: Methamphetamine is the most commonly abused drug in Missouri.

Fact: In terms of illicit drugs, rates of past year use for Missourians age 12 and over are: 9.4 percent for marijuana, 2.0 percent for cocaine, and just under 1 percent for methamphetamine.[6]

Myth: All methamphetamine used in Missouri is locally produced.

Fact: Western Missouri, in particular, receives supplies from traffickers based out of Mexico, California, and southwest U.S.[7] Local production is more common in the rural areas of Southeast, Southwest, and Central Missouri. Environmental hazards are an added concern with meth labs because of the volatile and toxic chemicals used in the cooking process.

Sources:
[1]Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Substance Abuse Treatment. Treatment Improvement Protocol Series 33 (1999).
[2]Rawson RA et al. Addiction. 2004 Jun;99(6):708-17.
[3]National Institue on Drug Abuse. Methamphetamine Abuse and Addiction. Research Report (revised September 2006).
[4]Copeland AL, Sorensen JL. Drug and Alcohol Dependence, 2001 March; 91-95.
[5]Brecht ML et al. J Psychoactive Drugs. 2000 Apr-Jun;32(2):211-20.
[6]Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. National Household Survey 2006-2007; Methamphetamine Use. *The NSDUH Report* (2007).
[7]U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration. Missouri 2009 State Factsheet (March 2009).

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